



Spouse Battlemind Training

Helping You and Your Family Transition from Deployments

Training Timeframe: POST-DEPLOYMENT

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

1

**Briefer note: This training was developed by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research. This module is designed to be administered to Military Spouses (Soldiers may also be present) during post-deployment reintegration. This Spouse Battlemind Training is part of a Battlemind Training System, which can be found at www.battlemind.org. Please send comments, suggestions, or questions to LTC Carl A. Castro (301-319-9174 or carl.castro@us.army.mil).
-Version3.0 15DEC2006**

Speaker Introduction (name, background, etc.). Thank you for coming!

Following a military deployment, Spouses develop or enhance a set of skills and strengths that allow their families to reintegrate successfully.

Throughout this training we are going to discuss how to enhance those skills in order to help yourself and your family to successfully reintegrate. We hope that you will find this training useful.

This training is meant to be interactive so please share your experiences.

How many years have you been married?

How many years have you been a military Spouse?

Do you have children? How many? What are their ages?

How many of you have been through a deployment already?



The Nature of Military Life



Military Life is Hard:

- Frequent military deployments
- Frequent training exercises
- Long duty days
- Weekend duty
- Frequent military moves (PCSs)
- Fear of death and/or serious injury
- Distance from extended family
- Financial strain
- Family separations

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

2

This list is an example of some of the hardships military families face. Most military Spouses can identify with at least a couple of these items.

What are some other challenges that aren't on this list?



The Nature of Military Life



Military Life has Benefits:

- Financial stability/Retirement benefits
- Health Care
- Community and sense of belonging
- Education and job training
- Overseas assignments
- Part of a tradition
- Resilient families
- Pride and patriotism

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

3

There are also benefits to being in the Army. This slide shows a partial list. Soldiers and Families join and remain in the Army for different reasons. Although Army life can be hard, it doesn't mean that being a military Spouse can't be a positive experience.

What do you like about being a military Spouse?



Spouse Battlemind



Spouse Battlemind is the Spouse's ability to face deployments with resilience and strength, allowing easier separations and smoother reunions. Key components include:

- Independence
 - The capability of having a fulfilling and meaningful life as part of an Army Centric Family.
- Resiliency
 - The ability to overcome setbacks and obstacles and to maintain positive thoughts during times of adversity.

Deployments and separations can be a positive growth experience for you and your family. However, some issues may arise that could negatively affect your or your family's well-being.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

4

What does independence mean for a military Spouse?

Independence can mean more than just surviving on your own, it also means having a full and rewarding life during separations.

What we mean by the Army Centric Family is that the Army is not just composed of Soldiers; Spouses and children enhance and support Soldiers' careers. This also means that the Army places demands on the family. Sometimes the needs of the Army must be placed first.

How would you define resiliency?

Why are independence and resiliency important for military Spouses?

Independence and resiliency help you adjust to the ups and downs of deployment as a military Spouse. Independence and resiliency can be learned. All they take is experience and effort.



Battlemind Training for Soldiers



Soldier Battlemind is the Soldier's inner strength to face fear and adversity in combat with courage.

Buddies (cohesion) vs. Withdrawal
Accountability vs. Controlling Behavior
Targeted vs. Inappropriate Aggression
Tactical Awareness vs. Hypervigilance
Lethally Armed vs. "Locked and Loaded" at home
Emotional Control vs. Detachment
Mission and OPSEC vs. Secretiveness
Individual Responsibility vs. Guilt
Non-Defensive (combat) vs. Aggressive Driving
Discipline and Ordering vs. Conflict

Battlemind skills help Soldiers survive in combat but may lead to problems if they are not adapted for use at home.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

5

We developed Battlemind Training to help Soldiers adapt their combat skills in order to use them successfully at home. Soldiers responded well to the training and recommended that similar training should be provided to Spouses.

Soldier Battlemind shows some of the skills Soldiers use to thrive during deployments. However, if these skills are not adapted for use at home, problems can arise.



Battlemind Training for Spouses



Working on this set of Battlemind skills throughout the military deployment cycle will help increase your and your family's resiliency.

Bonds (Social Support)
Adding/Subtracting Family Roles
Taking Control
Talking it Out
Loyalty and Commitment
Emootional Balance
Mental Health and Readiness
Independence
Navigating the Army System
Denial of Self (Self-Sacrifice)

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

6

As a Spouse you have skills and strengths that will enable you to thrive during and after deployments. These are just a subset of the skills and strengths that will allow you to adjust successfully to your Soldier's deployment.

The goals of post-deployment Spouse Battlemind training are to:

- identify common areas of deployment-related concern or conflict that military Spouses and Soldiers experience
- provide strategies to enhance your and your family's resilience after deployment
- identify cues for when to seek help and available resources for yourself and your family



Bonds (Social Support)



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

In Combat, Soldiers: Often made strong ties with their fellow Soldiers.

At Home, Spouses: May have developed new friends, strengthened existing friendships, became more involved in the Army community and participated in new activities. Some Spouses may have returned home to their families during the deployment.

Potential Conflicts: Soldiers may want to spend more time with their buddies than their Spouses. The fact that Spouses' new friends, strengthened friendships and new activities were developed without Soldiers may feel threatening to them.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

7

Because Soldiers are deployed for long periods of time, they frequently build strong bonds with their fellow Soldiers.

Similarly, Spouses also may have formed new bonds and strengthened existing relationships during deployments through participating in FRGs or other military groups, along with religious and other social organizations. Family members and friends also provided support.

What were your primary sources of support during the deployment?

How do you see them changing after your Soldier reintegrates into the family?

Problems can occur when there isn't agreement on how much time Soldiers should spend with their buddies and how much time Spouses should spend with their new friends or activities.



Bonds (Social Support)



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

Actions Spouses Can Take: Talk with your Soldier about how to balance the time spent between family and friends. Introduce new friends to your Soldier; don't hide new friendships or activities.

Actions Soldiers Can Take: Talk with your Spouse about how to balance the time spent between your family and buddies. Respect, and if possible, become involved in, your Spouse's friendships and new interests. Appreciate those who helped your Spouse in your absence.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

8

It is understandable that both you and your Soldier would want to spend time with those who helped you through the deployment. It is OK for both of you to spend time with your friends and have activities outside the home that don't involve one another, but time also needs to be spent as a family.

Open communication and balance between friends and family is key. Both of you need to be willing to compromise.



Adding/Subtracting Family Roles



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

In Combat, Soldiers: Were removed from the daily lives of their families and missed family events (anniversaries, births, graduations, birthdays, sporting events, etc.).

At Home, Spouses: Performed roles that might otherwise be shared.

Potential Conflicts: Spouses and Soldiers may resist resuming and sharing roles. Children may resist Soldiers' return to authority. Soldiers may feel left out and fail to actively participate in family roles.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

9

Not only did your Soldier miss special occasions such as anniversaries or a child's birth, they were not there to help with family crises, such as car accidents or illnesses. They were also less available to fill their usual roles.

What roles did you perform during the deployment that might change now that your Soldier has returned home?



Adding/Subtracting Family Roles



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

Actions Spouses Can Take: Help your Soldier resume family roles, despite possible resistance from your kids. Share day-to-day responsibilities upon reunion.

Actions Soldiers Can Take: Upon your return, resume an active role, but don't force it too much, too soon. Don't let changes in roles and/or responsibilities cause you to withdraw from the family. Understand that your Spouse may need a break.

When the Soldier returns home, discuss what roles each family member will fill. Spouses and Soldiers may be resistant to giving up or adding on roles because of future deployments or training exercises.

You may need to ease the Soldier back into daily responsibilities, especially if he/she is initially showing signs of withdrawing from the family. On the other hand, Soldiers may be enthusiastic and may want to be engaged in family roles; avoid leaving them out.

After a long year, both Spouses and Soldiers may feel they have earned a break, although you both can't take it at the same time.



Taking Control



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

In Combat, Soldiers: Maintained strict control of their weapons and gear in order to survive and were not in control of what was going on at home.

At Home, Spouses: Were the head of the household.

Potential Conflicts: Soldiers may have an increased need for order and control upon return. Spouses and Soldiers may have different priorities for the family's time and money. Soldiers may treat the household as a military unit.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

11

In combat, Soldiers were in control of their environment; this control over what was theirs can become a habit that comes home with them.

While your Soldier was deployed you created a system that worked for you and your family.

How have your priorities changed from pre-deployment to now?



Taking Control



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
E
N
T

Actions Spouses Can Take: Renegotiate priorities and incorporate those of your Soldier. Recognize your Soldier's need for order and control may be due in part to his/her deployment experiences.

Actions Soldiers Can Take: Respect and appreciate how your Spouse managed the household during your deployment. Be flexible and avoid treating family members like subordinates. Let go of the little things. If you have children, understand that they tend to like routine and predictability.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

12

Soldiers might see some things as a priority that Spouses disagree with. Open communication about each other's priorities is critical for the entire family.

Each of you may want to make a list of your priorities and then share them with each other in order to come up with a final list of the family's priorities that you both agree on. Also, discuss how any money earned during the deployment will be spent.

Spouses may need to explain how family routines were set up and why; avoid getting defensive. Discuss why changes were made. If the Soldier disagrees with how the family is running, talk together about how things could change and whether or not new changes could be just as effective.



Talking it Out



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

In Combat, Soldiers: Shared mission-specific information on a need-to-know basis and many had limited access to phone or email.

At Home, Spouses: Could share only a limited amount of what occurred during the deployment due to communication limitations.

Potential Conflicts: Spouses, Soldiers and children can't know all of the ways the deployment affected one another. Spouses may immediately want to know everything about Soldiers' deployments, but Soldiers may not be willing or ready to tell.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

13

Without talking to each other, none of you know exactly how much you were affected by the deployment.

You might find that your Soldier may have difficulty expressing his/her experiences and how he/she was affected upon his/her return. Understand that he/she may need time to process and react to their deployment before he/she talks about it with the family.



Talking it Out



B **Actions Spouses Can Take:** Your Soldier may not
A share every deployment experience with you. Let the
T story come out with time, and in his/her own words.
T Deployment is difficult for both Soldiers and family
L members; be prepared to hear all sides of the story.

E **Actions Soldiers Can Take:** Don't expect your Spouse
M to understand what it is like in a combat environment
I unless you share your experiences. Tell as much of
N your story as you feel you should, especially your
D children. Recognize that your Spouse and children
have a deployment story to share as well.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

14

It is important for both of you to share your deployment stories. You both may have made significant self-discoveries and participated in events that should be communicated when both of you are ready. Be patient and wait for your Soldier to share his/her experiences.

Kids may also have many questions about the deployment for the returning parent. Their questions should be answered honestly but with information based on the child's age and developmental stage (keep it simple for younger children, older children can usually handle more detail).



Loyalty and Commitment



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

In Combat, Soldiers: Needed to know their Spouses were committed and looked forward to their return.

At Home, Spouses: Needed to know their Soldiers were also committed.

Potential Conflicts: Both Spouses and Soldiers may have issues of mistrust and jealousy and be concerned about relationship commitment.

During the deployment, both of you may have needed reassurance that your Spouse was committed to the relationship; these reassurances are still important post-deployment. Most marriages survive deployments but the issue of loyalty and commitment must be mutual for your relationship to be resilient.



Loyalty and Commitment



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

Actions Spouses Can Take: Tell your Soldier how much you missed him/her and how you coped with being apart. Address any issues of mistrust and get help if needed.

Actions Soldiers Can Take: Tell your Spouse you love and appreciate her/him. Practice saying, "Thanks", and say it often. Don't hesitate to get help for issues of mistrust.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

16

Upon return, both of you may need to openly and honestly discuss any issues you had involving trust or jealousy, even if infidelity was not a problem. It takes time to re-establish or develop a trusting relationship.

Be appreciative of each other and make time for each other. Marriage requires continuing commitment.

How do you show each other your continued commitment?

What are some ways to get marital support? (chaplains, ACS, Military One Source)



Emotional Balance



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

In Combat, Soldiers: Controlled their emotions in order to be successful in missions.

At Home, Spouses: Managed individual and family emotional well-being with less emotional support from Soldiers.

Potential Conflicts: Spouse or Soldier expectations for emotional and physical intimacy may not be met upon return. The emotional control Soldiers used while they were deployed may lead to detachment or anger during reintegration. Children's' emotional responses to reintegration can range from detachment to clinging to the absent parent.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

17

Emotional changes occur for all family members during and after deployments.

Spouses' expectations about Soldiers' emotional involvement upon their return may not be met. It can be a challenge for Soldiers to turn emotions back on after controlling their emotions for a year. They may initially show only anger or detachment. It may take time to reestablish emotional intimacy.



Emotional Balance



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

Actions Spouses Can Take: Be patient. Emotional detachment can be common in Soldiers returning from combat. It will take time and effort from you and your Soldier to renew emotional and physical bonds.

Actions Soldiers Can Take: Appreciate the difference between sex and emotional intimacy. Spend time with each of your family members individually; put in the time and effort to reconnect physically and emotionally with your Spouse. Practice the full range of emotions; don't limit yourself to anger or detachment. Express yourself in a variety of ways (email, phone calls, flowers, notes, etc.).

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

18

Re-establishing emotional bonds takes time and effort; the same goes for physical intimacy. For some, re-kindling that spark will be easy, while for others it will take a little longer. Be patient and communicate if you are upset or angry. You and your Spouse may have expectations that are not met.

Talk about each other's emotional and physical needs without assuming what the other person wants. Needs and wants can change over the course of a year.

It is very important to take quality time to get to know each other again. It may be useful to go out on dates, or set aside time to spend together. If you have children, it is very important that you also spend quality time with them.



Mental Health and Readiness



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

In Combat, Soldiers: Were constantly alert, revved-up, aggressive when necessary, and may have worked long hours.

At Home, Spouses: Maintained individual and family mental well-being.

Potential Conflicts: Soldiers may display behaviors that cause Spouses or children to worry, including inappropriate anger, difficulty sleeping (including nightmares), startling easily, and excessive drinking. Soldiers who need help may not seek it. Spouses and children who need mental health services may have difficulty accessing care.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

19

All Soldiers are affected by combat. It is normal for Soldiers to experience symptoms due to their deployment experiences. Some may need help for their reactions.

You, too, may experience mental health issues after your Soldier's deployment.

If you have family members with a mental health concern, the rest of the family can also be affected.

Make your family's mental health a priority!



Mental Health and Readiness



B **Actions Spouses Can Take:** Behaviors that are
A causing problems in your family need to be
T addressed. Realize that you might not be the person
L your Soldier will accept help from. Know what mental
E health resources are available for you and your
M family.

I **Actions Soldiers Can Take:** Recognize changes in
N yourself that might be signs you should get help; seek
D assistance if you need it. Accept help from others,
including your Spouse. Avoid pushing away or lashing
out at those who try to help you. Don't attempt to
avoid or treat problems with alcohol or drugs.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

20

We discussed some of the normal reactions Spouses can have during and after deployments. However, some reactions can disrupt your daily life and need further attention. If you are experiencing any emotional or mental problems that are disrupting your daily life, you need to seek mental health care.

We have also discussed normal reactions for Soldiers. You play an important role in recognizing if your Soldier is having problems. If any changes cause you concern and/or persist, the Soldier should see a mental health professional.

Monitor your children's adjustment to the Soldier's return and have them seek mental health care if necessary.

We will discuss in more detail what are cues to seek help for you, your Soldier and your children in a few minutes.



Independence



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
E
N
D

In Combat, Soldiers: Made decisions that revolved around their deployment duties and were less available to participate in household decisions.

At Home, Spouses: Functioned alone or as a single parent by making household decisions with less input from Soldiers.

Potential Conflicts: Soldiers may want to change household decisions that were made during the deployment. Spouses may feel they need to give up doing things they enjoyed during the deployment, which may lead to resentment. Soldiers may feel left out or excluded due to Spouses' increased independence.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

21

At home, Spouses often made decisions independent of the Soldier. Making decisions without each other's input was necessary and may have become second nature.

Did decisions that were made during the deployment or when the Soldier returned lead to conflict?

Do you feel more independent because of the deployment?

What has changed?



Independence



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

Actions Spouses Can Take: Don't assume life will be as it was before or during the deployment. Take into account your Soldier's preference about household decisions. Be willing to compromise.

Actions Soldiers Can Take: Respect and appreciate your Spouse's decisions that were made during the deployment. Your home life will likely be different than it was before you deployed. Don't fix what's working; ask how you can help.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

22

Sharing roles, responsibilities and decisions after deployments can help you avoid decision-making conflicts.

If you have children, try to avoid arguing in front of them. Children may see the Soldier as the source of the conflict since everything was fine until the Soldier returned. Try to make joint parental decisions in order to avoid them playing mom against dad.



Navigating the Army System



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

In Combat, Soldiers: Followed rules and regulations.

At Home, Spouses: Navigated the Army environment, using available resources in order to better integrate into the military community.

Potential Conflicts: Spouses may be angry and resentful for having to deal with a complicated, bureaucratic organization (TRICARE, DEERS, etc.) while Soldiers were gone.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

23

Both Spouses and Soldiers navigate the Army system individually during a deployment. For Spouses, the fact that there are a lot different agencies that provide support to the family and these agencies often don't talk to each other or sometimes even know the other exists can be frustrating.

What kind of problems did you experience navigating the system during the deployment?

Is it easier to do so after your Soldier returns?



Navigating the Army System



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

Actions Spouses Can Take: Continue learning the Army system by asking questions. Be patient, it takes time. Recognize that you need to maintain the skills you obtained for future deployments and separations.

Actions Soldiers Can Take: Share all information you have about Army services with your Spouses. Recognize that it can be difficult to navigate the Army system; help your Spouse with the navigation.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

24

Learning what resources are available to you and how to interact with the system needs to continue after the deployment as well. Be proactive. Attending Family Readiness Group (FRG) meetings and talking to other Spouses in the unit can help you solve problems and learn about resources. It may also be helpful to attend Army Family Team Building (AFTB) classes.

The more you are comfortable with the Army system, the less likely you are to be frustrated and angry.



Denial of Self (Self-Sacrifice)



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

In Combat, Soldiers: Literally put their lives on the line for their fellow Soldiers in service of their country.

At Home, Spouses: Often sacrificed their own needs and desires (careers, educational goals, proximity to family and friends, etc.) by placing their needs last.

Potential Conflicts: Both Spouses and Soldiers may feel that they have sacrificed a lot and are not being fully appreciated.

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

25

What have you sacrificed as a military Spouse?

Spouses often sacrifice their career, thoughts of the ideal marriage, personal interests, hobbies, living near their family, etc., to support Soldiers and function successfully as military families.

After returning from combat, Soldiers may believe that they are the only ones who have made sacrifices.

This may turn into a competition about who sacrificed the most.



Denial of Self (Self-Sacrifice)



B
A
T
T
L
E
M
I
N
D

Actions Spouses Can Take: Tell your Soldier that you appreciate his/her sacrifice and that you know that being a Soldier is difficult.

Actions Soldiers Can Take: Be aware that you are not the only one making sacrifices. Show your Spouses how much you appreciate his/her hard work and encourage them to pursue his/her own interests.

Appreciate that each of you have made sacrifices; discuss them without trying to one-up each other. Keep in mind that neither of you should have to make unnecessary sacrifices; knowing what is unnecessary for you and your family involves communication.



Cues Spouses Might Need Help



**If any of the following are severe,
persistent or interfere with your daily life:**

- Feeling depressed and down
- Repeated crying episodes
- Feeling angry, tense, irritable, hopeless and/or resentful
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Significant appetite changes
- Not finding fun in things previously enjoyed
- Using medications, illegal drugs or alcohol to cope
- Taking out frustrations on others
- Suicidal or homicidal thinking, intent, or actions
- Isolating yourself or withdrawing from important relationships
- Family, coworkers or friends tell you that you need help



Cues Soldiers Might Need Help



**If any of the following are severe,
persist or interfere with your daily life:**

- Strong memories, nightmares or sleeping problems
- Easily startled
- Conflict, arguing, anger and hostility
- Excessive use of alcohol or other substances
- Performance problems at work or home
- Distant from Spouse or children; talking of a divorce or separation unwanted by Spouse
- Aggressive driving
- Feeling down or not able to enjoy life; not making future plans
- Family members, NCOs or friends tell you that you need help
- Suicidal or homicidal thinking, intent, or actions



Cues Children Might Need Help



Look for *changes* in how your child normally behaves and problems that persist:

- Irritability, problems controlling his/her temper
- Getting into fights, hitting, biting, and/or kicking
- Having problems paying attention or sitting still
- Withdrawing from friends, becoming a loner at school or at home
- Being unhappy, sad or depressed
- Academic problems
- School personnel, friends, or others tell you that your child needs help

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

29

Children also benefit from professional care. Be patient and understanding with them, they may not know why they are reacting in certain ways or notice if they have changed.

The earlier anyone in your family with a mental health concern seeks help, the sooner they will be on the road to recovery.



Mental and Behavioral Health Resources for Families



- Military Chaplain or Civilian Religious Personnel
- Mental/Behavioral Health Services
- Army/Military One Source: 1-800-342-9647
or www.MilitaryOneSource.com
- Army Community Services (ACS)
- Social Work Services (SWS)
- Family Advocacy Program (FAP)
- Child Youth Services (CYS)
- New Parent Support Program (NPSP)
- School Counselor

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

30

Here is a list of mental health resources generally available to military families. Your FRG leaders, chaplains and your Soldier's NCOs may be able to provide you with a local list of resources.

Who has heard about Military One Source?

Military One Source is a great resource for military families. You, your children and your Soldier can receive anonymous and confidential (your Soldier's unit will not be notified) sessions with a local, civilian mental health provider. You can receive six free sessions per problem for up to six different problems per year. That means you could receive almost one session per week, anonymously and at no cost.



Point of Contact and Disclaimer



WRAIR Land Combat Study Team

www.battlemind.org

(301) 319-9607

This presentation contains a combination of research findings and recommendations, many of which are based on personal observations and experiences. Therefore, the opinions and views expressed here are those of the Land Combat Study Team, and should not be considered representing the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense.

Thank you for coming today and for your participation.